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ABSTRACT

Several principles of gestalt therapy are applied in an analysis of the similarities between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project Quilt. The NAMES Project Quilt memorializes people who have died of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The creators of the two memorials engaged in the initial searches for "whole" images which could symbolize the gestalt of human losses. A tenet of gestalt therapy maintains that the contact between people and their environments define their identity. Both memorials provide opportunities for such contact, producing creative adjustment in the form of learning or insight. Gestalt therapists believe that an accurate perception can only be achieved when the figure is distinguished from the ground. Both memorials present the viewer with a figure that emerges from the ground and ultimately connects into a mosaic or tapestry of figures which can never again be seen as a generalized ground. Both memorials confront the visitor with gestalten. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project Quilt are each cast in a form which allows an approach to the gestalt--a gestalt which is larger than the instrument which carries its message and realizable only in the free responses of the viewer's mind. Although the two memorials are not similar in every aspect, each enlarges the vision of those who make contact and encourages the internal creative adjustment which gestalt therapists believe is essential to personal growth and healthy response. (Twenty-six references are attached.) (MM)

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Making Contact: The NAMES Project in Comparison to the Vietnam Memorial

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The principles of gestalt therapy, developed primarily by Frederick Perls (1970), build on earlier concepts of gestalt psychology as defined by Wolfgang Köhler (1947). As a therapeutic and educational extension of gestalt psychology, gestalt therapy seeks ways to bring clarity out of ambiguity and elicit deeper insights and more focused responses. In their analyses of the human mind in contact with its environment, gestalt therapists have made important contributions to an understanding of intrapersonal communication. In their explorations of enlarged perceptions and enlightened responses, gestaltists have helped define the nature of dialogue. Gestalt therapists also give considerable attention to communication avoidance among receivers, particularly the ways people avoid contact with new information and experience. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) described three ways of avoiding contact: (1) retroflection (a "turning sharply back against" the new idea, keeping it at such a distance that it cannot affect one's thinking), (2) introjection (a pseudo-contact in which there is awareness at a superficial level but the significance and implications of the new idea are "unassimilated", and (3) projection (in which a person simply projects previously held categories, explanations, or stereotypes, and thus sees only what is expected).

In this paper, several principles of gestalt therapy are applied in an analysis of the similarities of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project Quilt. Much analysis could be done of the ways people have practiced retroflection, introjection, and projection to avoid confronting the truths and tragedies of the Vietnam War and the AIDS epidemic. But the focus of this paper is on "contact" and the ways both memorials successfully break through the avoidance. The wall and the quilt have profoundly affected the perceptions of visitors and allowed them to approach the complexities of two massive tragedies. Both memorials urge contact with the individual human losses which must be

comprehended before the collective tragedies can be grasped; both memorials encourage insight and inspire response; both memorials commemorate pain, yet ultimately offer comfort. Each enlarges the vision of those who make contact and encourages the internal creative adjustment which gestalt therapists believe is essential to personal growth and healthy response.

Creators' Perceptions

Gestalt therapists have written extensively about perception, particularly the mental construction of complex visual images. They warn against mistaking a fragment for the whole and encourage a search for the gestalt in all of its subtlety and complexity. This effort to perceive the whole of a visual image is described by gestaltists as analogous to seeking the whole of each new experience or idea as it presents itself, and ultimately approaching the whole of self and others.

The creators of the two memorials engaged in the initial searches for "whole" images which could symbolize the gestalt of the human losses. The developing visual images as described by Maya Ying Lin and Cleve Jones are striking in their similarity. Both creators were seeking metaphors for pain and in their seeking found larger metaphors for healing. Each moved toward a larger vision of the whole by connecting anguished images of alienation and death into a gestalt that affirms community and life.

Maya Ying Lin visited the site of the proposed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in November, 1981, and there "decided that the earth should be cut open, with stone exposed in the wound" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 566). She has described the process by which this image developed in her mind.

> I walked around this beautiful park, surrounded by trees. People were tossing a frisbee....I had an impulse to cut open the earth...an initial violence that in time would heal. The

> grass would grow back, but the cut would remain, a pure, flat-surface, like a geode when you cut into it and polish the edge. I didn't visualize heavy physical objects implanted in the earth; instead it was as if the black-brown earth were polished and made into an interface between the sunny world and the quiet, dark world beyond, that we can't enter....
>
> I chose black granite to make the surface reflective and peaceful. The angle was formed solely in relation to the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument to create a unity between the nation's past and present (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 557).

Cleve Jones remembers standing on a street corner in the Castro district of San Francisco in November, 1985--the day statistics were released announcing 1000 deaths in San Francisco from AIDS, many of them within a ten-block radius of where he stood. He said to a friend at the street crossing that if they were standing in a meadow with 1000 corpses, then people would see the tragedy--but the deaths were occurring behind closed doors, the dead were numbered but not named, and "it seemed we could all die without anyone really knowing." This realization came to him on the eve of a memorial march for George Moscone and Harvey Milk. As an organizer of the march, Jones asked marchers to carry signs, on paper or cardboard--each with the name of a person known to have died of AIDS. On the damp night of the march, Jones brought out hidden ladders and the names carried by the marchers were taped to the facade of the Federal Building. In the rain, people stood together to look at the names pasted together--and some learned for the first time the fate of a roommate or former lover. As Jones looked at water-soaked signs on that grim, cold night--the image before him was "matched in his mind" with a warm contrasting image. He remembers saying in an undertone: "It looks almost like a quilt." His mind was "flooded with memories" of a quilt passed from generation to generation by the women of his

family, a quilt made of bright patches of purples, reds, and yellows, with dragons on it--and always comforting to run his hand over if he was sick, a quilt that he still asks his mother to bring out at Christmas. He carried the image as a "photo in his brain" for a year and realized that a quilt is given in kindness "to someone who is sick or weary," and that the patches stitched together create "a whole that offers life and warmth and comfort" (Jones, 1988b). He also realized that a quilt is a strong American symbol--"our own folk art form that has brought people together for generations" (Jones, 1988a). When Jones made the first panel of the quilt over a year later in memory of his friend Marvin Feldman, his original images of despair on that San Francisco street corner were still merging with images of hope. He decided that the panels of the quilt should be "6 feet by 3 feet because that's the size of a grave. It's also the size of a man" (Robb, 1988, p. 20).

Creative Adjustment

An important tenet of gestalt therapy "maintains that it is the contact between the person and his environment that defines the person's identity" (Van De Riet, Korb, and Gorrell, 1980, p. 22). This is substantially different from the behaviorist position that the environment determines a person's behavior. The gestalt view holds that the contact is voluntary (in contrast to the behaviorist view of controlled conditioning) and the effect is on the mind (not just on behavior). This effect on the mind caused by genuine contact with a new idea or experience is described by gestaltists as "creative adjustment," and can be viewed as growth, change, resolution, or deepening of intrapersonal communication. If intrapersonal communication can be symbolized by a helical spiral, every new contact can be described as one of two kinds of creative adjustment. Either an addition is made to the intrapersonal helix (learning) or an earlier perception is clarified and deepened (insight).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project both provide opportunities for the genuine contact that produces creative adjustment in the form of learning or insight. Although creative adjustments are not always externally observable--visible demonstrations of changed perceptions, altered attitudes, and resolutions of internal conflict are frequent among visitors to the memorials.

Maya Ying Lin says of the Veterans Memorial: "I didn't want a static object that people would just look at, but something they could relate to as a journey, or passage, that would bring each to his own conclusions" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 557). On November 13, 1982, at the dedication ceremony, it is said that "the people and the wall met. Standing. Sitting in wheelchairs. Stretching up. Leaning over the top. Holding each other. Kneeling. Walking back and forth. Crying. Smiling. Staring. In silence. Talking. Weeping. Hugging. Discovering. Remembering. Promising" (Scruggs and Swerdlow, 1985, p. 153). One veteran present that day had won the Congressional Medal of Honor but feared how people would react if he wore it. After the dedication, he "opened his suitcase, took out the medal with its blue ribbon, and put it on for the first time" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 573). A father led his two small children to the wall so they could touch a particular name and learn its meaning for them. He said: "Don't ever forget that man. Don't you ever forget him. If it were not for that man, you would never be here. Don't ever forget" (Scruggs and Swerdlow, 1985, p. 153). In the years since the dedication, the visitors have continued to come--touching the stone and being touched by it. One veteran left this message in a note by his friend's name:

> I never cried--my chest becomes unbearably painful and my throat tightens so I can't even croak, but I haven't cried. I wanted to, just couldn't.
>
> I think I can, today. Dan, I'm crying now. Bye Smitty. Get some rest (Carlson and Hocking, 1987, p. 10).

The creative adjustments which occur in the presence of The NAMES Project Quilt are also spontaneous and sometimes profound--described by one member of the road crew as "many minor miracles" (McMillan, 1988, p. 3). As in the presence of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, some of the adjustments are quiet and unobservable. But many are visible and unmistakable. Morse (1987b) describes visitors as "transformed" and quotes one observer of the San Francisco unfurling: "Even people who are open, receptive to AIDS issues, when they see this quilt...feel it in a whole different way. That's why it's important to take it around the country" (p. E-1). Around the country--security guards, police officers and maintenance personnel usually insisted on strict union contracts and time schedules when the quilt was scheduled for their cities on the 1988 tour; yet in the presence of the quilt, many of these same people offered extra help, stayed late, or came back to donate services. Joe van Es-Ballesteros (1988), who accompanied the quilt on tour, several times saw local policemen call their partners to stand quietly before the 12' x 12' section of the quilt that names police officers and sheriff's deputies of the city and county of San Francisco. Cleve Jones (1988b) has watched people pass "an invisible barrier" as they approach the quilt. "Laughing men arriving from a tea dance sober quickly; uptight, suspicious teenagers soften and open. Everyone is silent by the time they reach the first canvas walkway. The people who say they're going to walk around it once are the people who stay six hours." In Minneapolis, at the Humphrey Metrodome, tourists who asked directions to the panels for Liberace and Rock Hudson became "sidetracked by the powerful statements of nearby panels" (Hays, 1988, p. 13). In Kansas City, a man threatened over the telephone to come with a gun and "start shooting" unless a panel made by a friend of his dead son was taken down. Despite further threats of arson and lawsuits, the

man and his wife were finally persuaded to visit the quilt. After walking slowly among the 2000 panels in Municipal Auditorium, they apologized, made a financial contribution, and said they were going home to make their own panel for their son (van Es-Ballesteros, 1988; Jones, 1988b). Descriptions of visible creative adjustments at each unfolding of the quilt are noticeably similar to the responses at the dedication of the wall as described above. Hays (1988) writes:

> A white-haired grandmother negotiates her walker through the crowd, a hanky pressed tightly in her wrinkled hand. A little girl sits quietly beside a colorful panel caressing the teddy bear sewn onto it. A blind man with cane in hand is guided to a specific panel; bends to his knees; and feel the layers of fabric, threads and sequins; feels the power and the healing. a lady is caught breathless by a visual expression of love and loss. A tattooed man dressed in black leather kneels to place a carnation near the photo sewn onto a panel made of levis. A teenager offers a blank stare at a message of love written in crayon by a girl for her lost uncle (p. 13).

Sometimes knowledge of the quilt, even at a great distance, begins a process of creative adjustment which culminates in its presence. A black woman, aged 65-70, appeared at Moscone Center in December, 1987, while preparations were underway for showing the quilt. She watched but declined to speak to anyone. A week later she returned, wearing the same dress, but now carrying a piece of fabric which she gave to Cleve Jones. It was a panel for her son. Jones later learned from her surviving son that this woman had closed the door of his brother's room in West Virginia when he died three years before and had never opened it since. When she heard of The NAMES Project, she took a bus

from West Virginia to San Francisco and sought out the quilt. After leaving the panel for her son, she took a bus back across the country and opened his room (Jones, 1988b). The creative adjustments caused by contact with the quilt may be best summarized by a person-with-AIDS in Boston who observed: "Only the coldest of hearts can view the quilt and not be moved and changed in attitude" (Adams, 1988, p. 19).

Figure and Ground

Gestalt therapists believe that an accurate perception can only be achieved when the figure is distinguished from the ground. The figure "is the focus of interest" and the ground "is the setting or context" (Perls, et al., 1951, p. 25). Genuine contact leading to creative adjustment is possible only when an idea or experience or person stands out from the ground. When concentration becomes focused in "a way that is detailed, structured, vivid, concernful" (Perls, et al., 1951, p. 63), both the visual field and the mind set are transformed. The generalizations and stereotypes which are only possible when viewing a hazy, merged ground are replaced by contact with a figure which is immediate and complex. The psychological distance which allows retroflection, introjection, and projection becomes impossible in the presence of a figure.

Both memorials present the viewer with a figure that emerges from the ground and ultimately connects into a mosaic or tapestry of figures which can never again be seen as a generalized ground. (In this sense, the memorials contradict the gestalt description of a figure advancing and then receding into the ground as another figure emerges. Once encountered, the names on the wall and the quilt do not recede.)

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial requires close physical proximity for a name to be found and seen distinctly, and this very physical presence further assures contact. Ehrenhaus (1988, p. 50) writes that the Veterans Memorial confronts

the visitor with the indefiniteness of the "when" of death, and the loneliness of each death; contact with this reality is a reminder to the viewer that he/she is also a figure threatened not only by death but the loss of individual identity in the hazy memories of others. A contact with a name on the wall is both a recognition of that unique figure and an affirmation of selfhood--lest both be lost in the ground. During a 1980 Memorial Day service at the site of the yet unbuilt memorial, veteran leader Jack Wheeler was speaking of figures distinct from the ground when he said: "There's no more sacred part of a person than his or her name. We have to start remembering real, individual names" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 562).

Naming has much to do with remembering and being remembered. Some persons who have sewn panels find it difficult to give them up for attachment to the quilt (Jones, 1988b). Possibly one reason is the fear that the individual name will be diminished and submerged into the larger ground. But, in fact, the quilt--by its very design--preserves the importance of each individual figure. Moreover, because of its increasing size, the quilt can only be seen and appreciated one panel at a time. The need to be remembered is causing some persons-with-AIDS to create their own panels (Ruskin, 1987, p. 49). Brian had seen the quilt in Phoenix and took his mother and sister to see it in Minneapolis, so they could talk about starting his panel (Hayes, 1988, p. 10). Before the reading of the names at the unfurling of the quilt in Los Angeles, Michael Katz said to the audience: "Someday I may have my own place of honor on this living memorial. If I do, please: Remember my name" (Ford, 1988a, p. A-12).

The human desire to remain a figure distinct from the ground--even after death--is answered by both memorials.

Gestalten to Gestalt

Both the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project Quilt confront

the visitor with gestalten. Perls, et al. (1951) believed that every creative adjustment in the mind widens one's perception, that every genuine contact brings one closer to the whole. But the gestalt is almost impossible to grasp if approached deductively, for preformed categories serve to limit and filter new perceptions.

The Veterans Memorial allows the visitor an inductive approach to the gestalt of the Vietnam War by presenting the names--each one a gestalten, each one a unique part of the mosaic. This form of confrontation was foreshadowed by Life magazine in June 1969, when it printed side by side, page after page, non-alphabetically, the photographs and names of the 242 American soldiers who had died that week in Vietnam. The editors wrote: "we must pause to look into the faces. More than we must know how many, we must know who" (Vietnam..., 1969, p.20). Thirteen years later, the founders of the Veterans Memorial, like the editors of Life, understood that tragedy is measured by who--not by how many. They understood the poet John Peale Bishop when he wrote of an earlier war: "The most tragic thing about the war was not that it made so many dead men, but that it destroyed the tragedy of death" (Hallie, 1979, p. 274). By demanding contact with individual names, each one different and special, the Memorial conveys the tragedy of Vietnam in a way that statistics and acres of identical flags on identical graves could never do.

Similarly, the visitor to The NAMES Project Quilt is shaken from preconceived and generalized perceptions of the AIDS crisis--as contact is made with the tragedies of individual deaths. The tragedy of AIDS is the loss of Roger Lyon, whose panel is comprised of get well cards from San Francisco fifth-graders whose class he visited near the end of his life; the loss of Nancy in White Plains, New York, who--as she was dying in a hospital--was evicted from her impoverished apartment by a landlord who said "I always win"; the loss of six-

year-old hemophiliac Layton Mullins in Marion, Ohio; the loss of Larry L. whose daughter loves him; the loss of Mark who once flooded his parents' living room with a whole keg of beer; the loss of Reggie Hightower from Atlanta, Georgia, who was black and deaf and gay and proud; the loss of Terry who carried a poem about tolerance in his wallet; the loss of Mark Metcalf who arrived at the University of California at Berkeley on a football scholarship and graduated with a Ph.D. in microbiology and whose death interrupted his work on the Kesterson Reservoir pollution problem (Ruskin, 1988, pp. 11, 34, 35, 51, 54, 55, 57, 76, 77, 84, 133). A self-described "Junior League-type volunteer" had read 32 assigned names over the microphone at the Moscone Center on December 17, 1987, when she paused and spontaneously added the name of her husband's best friend from college (Morse, 1987, p. E1). Possibly in that moment she understood better the threads that comprised the tapestry in front of her. She was now approaching the gestalt inductively by recognizing a gestalten.

There is also another level of gestalten to which both memorials call attention. As the gestalt of the Vietnam War or the AIDS epidemic can only be approached by first appreciating the loss of an individual life, so the gestalt of that single death can be realized only through an awareness of the complexity of that one life. Some names at the Veterans Memorial are frequently visited, touched, and honored--while others seem overlooked and alone--reflecting the uniqueness of the individual lives whose stories ended in Vietnam. The NAMES Project allows the gestalten of each named person to be woven into the very fabric of the memorial, and the highly individual stories are reflected in the objects sewn to the panels--photographs, Halloween costumes, university pennants, military medals, locks of hair, a jock strap, a cowboy hat, a Buddhist's robe.... Moreover, contact with the gestalten of individuals is a reminder that victimization and death do not rewrite a life story, and that the characters

behind the names are as varied as humanity itself. The visitor must consider this individuality when confronted by the quilt panel in remembrance of Roy Cohn. It reads: "Bully, Coward, Victim."

Gestalten are recognized and the gestalt approached only by an active and often painful search. (In contrast, retroflection, introjection, and projection are all passive states of mind.) Although an alphabetical listing of names was suggested for the Veterans Memorial and desired by some veterans themselves, the creator knew that an active search for a name parallels the search for the meaning of the war. That search should not be an easy or passive process. On the eve of the Memorial's dedication, visitors held matches, cigarette lighters, torches, and flashlights as the search went on through the night. "One father struck match after match, and then said to his wife, in a hushed voice, 'There's Billy'" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 573). Similarly, it is not intended that the individual panels of the quilt be too easily found. One searcher at the Moscone Center in December, 1987, had driven 240 miles to look for panels that might commemorate three friends. He said: "It is just overwhelming. I've been looking for their names, and I haven't found them yet. I don't think I want to find them" (McCabe, 1987, p. A-2).

When trying to perceive the whole inductively, by assembling the gestalt from the gestalten, one is reminded that the whole is never complete, finished, or fully understood. Names are still being chiselled into the stone as soldiers' remains are found or identified. Each day, more panels are sewn for the quilt.

Ways of Response

In describing gestalt therapy, Naranjo (1970, p. 66) stresses that a book, picture, object, or person which enters one's experience is valuable only insofar as it meets needs and allows freedom of response. When listing the "implicit moral injunctions of gestalt therapy," Naranjo lists these two together:

(1) "Accept no should or ought other than your own. Adore no graven image." (2) "Take full responsibility for your actions, feelings, and thoughts" (p.67). When describing the form a sculptor creates, Naranjo says it is successful only when it does not preach, only when it offers a "content which transcends the instrument," only when it enables response without dictating its nature (p. 64). The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project Quilt are each cast in a form which allows an approach to the gestalt--a gestalt which is larger than the instrument which carries its message and realizable only in the free responses of the viewer's mind.

Both memorials make statements, but they do not preach. Both say simply and explicitly: "All these people died." And each asks implicitly: "Do you care?" Through this simple statement and implied question, both memorials "speak" and initiate dialogue. One parent understood this and wrote when contributing to the Veterans Memorial: "For my son, so he can ask questions I'll never be able to answer" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 558). Mainardi (1988) writes that quilts "are associated with warmth and comfort, rest and reassurance" and "speak of a better world" (p. 53). Ehrenhaus (1988) has discussed the silent presence of an architectural form and its ability to offer symbolic expression and initiate encounter. He writes of the Veterans Memorial: "we are not handed an explanation of the meaning of the war.... Rather, if we choose, we must discover how the memorial 'speaks'" (p. 49). Similarly, Ford (1988b) wrote that "the quilt 'spoke' eloquently...[in San Diego] last night" (p. E-1) and later described citizens of Houston "meeting" the quilt (1988c, p. E-1).

Both memorials evoke responses, but not proclamations. This makes them unusual among historical markers--distinct from the statues which serve as backdrops for orators, the arches through which conquering and liberating armies proclaim their dominance, and the mausoleums to which visiting statesmen make

pilgrimages as demonstrations of their own good intentions. Voices are quieter and less ego-centered in the presence of the wall and the quilt; visitors are more often seen addressing the deceased--and listening to them--instead of enlisting the dead as allies in establishing their own credibility. The quietness that descends as visitors approach the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The NAMES Project Quilt seems to reflect the very process of creative adjustment--away from a self-conscious exhibition of predetermined values toward an outer-directed response to the names in stone and cloth. Carlson and Hocking (1987) speak of the eloquence that the Veterans Memorial draws from visitors and the range of responses it evokes. They have observed several kinds of responses to the wall, including eulogistic, mediumistic, and apologetic responses.

The eulogistic responses often take the form of objects left behind. Beneath the names of veterans, visitors leave wreaths, garden flowers, crosses, war medals, unit patches, dog tags, discharge papers, photographs, love notes, even toys (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 565), all of which are collected and preserved by the National Park Service. In cities across the country, visitors have left similar objects on the quilt: photos, flowers, gay pride and political buttons pinned to panels, and many letters to the dead, all of which are saved and filed as part of The NAMES Project (van Es-Ballesteros, 1988). Unlike funereal eulogies which address third parties, the statements made through these objects at both memorials are usually addressed to the person who is named; these eulogistic responses are thus closer to interpersonal dialogue than to public speeches. Some responses, in fact, may mystify a third party. In every city, Jack Carter (traveling with the quilt) left the same words, "The Median Above To Be Three," on a signature panel addressed to his friends Wade and Joe--words that have meaning only because they were the dying words of one of them (Jones, 1988b). In Los Angeles, New York and other cities, small stones left on the quilt aroused suspicions of mischief, until this was

recognized as a Jewish sign of respect (van Es-Ballesteros, 1988). The quilt, by the nature of its creation, allows initial eulogistic responses to be woven into its fabric--but at least once this also occurred at the Veterans Memorial. A Navy pilot brought a Purple Heart to the wall while it was under construction. "'It belonged to my brother,' he explained. 'He and I flew together. I'd like to put it with the concrete that's being poured.' The pilot saluted as the medal disappeared into the wall" (Swerdlow, 1985, p. 571).

The dialogue reaches an explicit level in "mediumistic responses" in which the names are not only addressed, but addressed in a way that presumes the message is received--as though the wall and quilt are mediums for reaching the dead. Some letters left at the Veterans Memorial are complex or coded and again understandable only to the person named on the wall. Others are clear in their messages, but so personal that to read them seems an intrusion. One mother left a small stuffed bear and a photograph with this note: "I'm bringing 'Teddy Bear' and a picture of your loved car. I realize they can't stay there long, but they are yours and I want them to be with you." A young man left a wedding photograph near the name of a veteran with this message: "Sir, although you don't know me, I know you. I love your daughter and will do everything to protect her" (Carlson and Hocking, 1987, p. 12). Similarly, although the medium is cloth instead of granite, messages written on blank panels of the quilt read: "To Michael, who I never got to say goodbye to. Luv u always, Rose" or "How's Christmas in heaven? Love, Paul" (Morse, 1987b, p. E-1).

The "apologetic responses" are perhaps the most intense--and evoked sometimes even from visitors who were not in a personal relationship to the deceased. They often express helplessness and guilt. A battlefield nurse left a message at the wall which read: "We did what we could, but it was not enough because I found you here.... I told you you'd be alright but I lied, please forgive me" (Carlson and Hocking, 1987, p. 14). In San Francisco, a message was left by a woman who

apologized because "she refused to hug her friend when he was dying in 1981. 'I know better now,' she wrote" (Ruskin, 1987, p. 49).

Even those who intend to remain aloof, who define themselves as objective observers, are sometimes moved to respond in spite of themselves. A reporter from The New York Times visited the quilt in San Francisco, and "for ten minutes she seemed cold and distant." Twenty minutes into a conversation with Cleve Jones, she started to weep, and said "she didn't think she could finish the interview" (Morse, 1987a, p. D-1). Possibly the highest level of creative adjustment is achieved when the contact is so intense that it breaks through preplanned resistance or avoidance. Such contacts are frequent at both memorials.

Conclusion

The two memorials are not similar in every aspect. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is stationary, constantly accessible, and has an inherent permanency in its structure. The NAMES Project Quilt includes a creative dimension through which thousands of people have a part in its construction, and it communicates not only names but a glimpse of individual life stories. Yet even these differences are less significant than they may appear. The wall has acquired a kind of mobility through a scale model which has been on national tour; and an effort is now underway to collect and preserve oral histories of the named soldiers. The names on the quilt were first displayed within yards of the names on the wall, and some hope they will find a permanent home a short walk away at the Smithsonian Institution. The remaining differences seem minor compared to the similar therapeutic and educational achievements of the memorials.

The application of gestalt therapy as a vehicle for understanding the memorials seems increasingly appropriate as their contributions to healing are recognized. Maya Ying Lin explains of the wall: "[It] was built as a very psychological memorial. It's not meant to be cheerful or happy, but to bring out in people the realization of loss and a cathartic healing process" (Scruggs and Swerdlow, 1985,

p. 147). Cleve Jones understood the cathartic nature of the quilt the winter afternoon when he made the first panel for Marvin Feldman in his backyard, but only later did he realize its therapeutic nature. Now professional counselors are present at each unfolding of the quilt to aid, as needed, in the healing process (Jones, 1988b). Both memorials allow an open, healing expression of grief by those who know the names--and consistent with the challenging nature of gestalt therapy, both memorials treat the deficient vision of the larger population.

The memorials educate visitors by allowing them to approach the gestalt of two human tragedies; but the whole of each has not yet been seen, and the full extent of the educational process is not yet known. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been compared to the top of a pyramid, pushing up through the ground and demanding to be recognized, while much of it still lies buried and unknown. The quilt grows larger with each unfolding, approaching 10,000 panels when it returned to Washington in October, 1988; yet many more deaths from AIDS are still unknown and unnamed.

Ultimately the gestalt of a human encounter includes the perceiver as well as the focus of the enlarged perception. Maya Ying Lin recognizes that the whole of her creation is a "circle" which includes the viewer. "One part is the two arms of the wall. The final segment of the circle is the living person who visits, and through his presence fills in the part of the circle that has been omitted" (Scruggs and Swerdlow, 1985, p. 77). Cleve Jones, in Portland, at the last stop of the 1988 tour, saw an additional dimension of the quilt's gestalt. During the closing ceremony, as music played, visitors sat or knelt on the walkways. The quilt seemed to "glow" that night as light rays amplified the fabric and sequins and mirrors, and appeared connected to the living people that surrounded it. He realized that until that time he had envisioned the quilt as empty--but it no longer was (Jones, 1988b). He saw that the namers are also part of the whole.

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